DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 364 CE 039 783

AUTHOR Dik, David W.
TITLE Empowering Parents through Computer Literacy Training.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the National Adult Education Conference (Louisville, KY, November 6-10, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Classroom Environment; *Computer Literacy; Educational Benefits; Individual Development; Influences; *Outcomes of Education; *Parent Influence; Parents; *Play, Postsecondary Education; School Attitudes; *Self Actualization; Self Concept; Self Esteem; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

After several groups of parents began learning basic computer skills, it became evident that they were developing or evolving into a different relationship with their children; as the parents' skills in the area of computer literacy were strengthened, they became empowered to enter into the teaching and learning process. Writers on empowerment (a process through which people become able to influence those people and organizations that affect their lives and the lives of those they care about) have identified many interrelated actions that contribute to empowerment, including recognizing and valuing one's skills and knowledge; developing additional skills, obtaining more knowledge, and gaining more access to resources to interact more forcefully with people and institutions; and broadening interpersonal networks to overcome feelings of individual or family isolation. With these elements of empowerment in mind, adult educators must be sensitive and alert to creating an environment that will foster and encourage adults to change their perceptions about themselves and the social institutions affecting their lives. Particularly effective toward this end are learning environments that are noncompetitive and learning activities that revolve around play. As happened in the case of the parents studying computer skills, learning in a playful environment generates trust between students and teachers and helps learners build the sense of self-worth and self-confidence that is necessary to individual empowerment. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED249364

EMPOWERING PARENTS THROUGH COMPUTER LITERACY TRAINING

David W. Dik
Assistant Director
Cornell Cooperative Extension
111 Roberts Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14853

November, 1984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DDik

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE039783

EMPOWERING PARENTS THOUGH COMPUTER LITERACY TRAINING

After working with several groups of parents to teach them basic computer skills, it became evident that a different relationship with their children was evolving. By strengthening adult skills in this one area of basic computer literacy, the child's most important teacher was empowered to enter into the teaching/learning process. In this context it is important to explore the meaning of empowerment.

A DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment: A process through which people become more able to influence those people and organizations that affect their lives and the lives of those they care about.

Changes that are required for empowerment to take place include:

- People, individually or collectively, must develop a greater sense of self-worth and self-confidence;

- There must be a change in people's perceptions of their relations with other people and with institutions that presently define their social world. (Vanderslice 1984).

Implicit in the definition of empowerment is the belief that individuals know what is best for themselves and for their families. When people are empowered, they are able to unearth, recapture, or take back some function in their lives. Roger Gould, author of Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life, defines growth as: "Growth is to take back some function or some capacity that you have as a human being which you have

not allowed yourself to use fully because somewhere in the back of your head you said I am not allowed or supposed to be that kind of person." In a very real sense, empowerment is taking charge of one's life through the process of gaining new skills and confidence.

Writers on empowerment have specifically identified many interrelated actions, not necessarily sequential, that contribute to empowerment. (Freire 1971; Gavena 1980; Whithman 1982):

- Recognize and value one's skills and knowledge, and resources;

- Develop additional skills, obtain more knowledge, and gain more access to resources to interact more forcefully with people and institutions;

- Broaden interpersonal networks to overcome feelings of individual or family isolation;

- Develop personal beliefs that one's needs and opinions are legitimate and that it is legitimate to voice them;

- Become more involved in successful interactions with one's environment to reinforce one's feelings of effectiveness and self-confidence.

With these basic elements of empowerment in mind, it is evident that any program planned and implemented must allow one or more of these changes to occur. A primary consideration is the skill and ability of the adult educator. This individual must be sensititve and alert to creating an environment that will foster, nurture and encourage adults to change their perceptions about themselves and the social institutions affecting

their lives. In order to bring this change about, adult educators must:

- Look at adult learners in terms of strengths and assets;
- Allow adult learners to share in what is most comfortable in learning situations;
- Reinforce, expand, enhance and enrich individual learning skills and progress;
- Create a noncompetitive environment;
- Play.

PLAY AS LEARNING -- LEARNING AS PLAY

Most adult education programs are planned with the motive of a task orientation. These are predicated upon accomplishment and tend to bring out phobias of failure, shyness, and competition. When adults find themselves in a situation where their own learning style is supported, this environment is most productive for learning.

In the program we offered, it was evident that parents wanted to learn about computers. Those who signed up for the program were self-selective. But like most of us that come to new learning situations, they also brought with them some preconceived notions.

- Anxiety
- Doubt about the ability to learn a new skill
- Fear of failure

- Social pressure
- Uncertainity about the use of machines

One of the discoveries early on was the notion of play. The classroom environment was one where everyone could use play in an attempt to gain mastery with the computer. This is a very liberating experience. Play simulates reality without being bound by it. Adults could do all sorts of things with the computer without having the results of terrible consequences. They were able to be actively involved in a noncompetitive event. Our social structure unfortunately depicts play as a winning activity. It does not need to be that way. Play can be fun, a celebration, an adventure, artform, spontaneity, joyful, and inherently educational.

Some adult educators would scoff at the notion of play as learning as a very unproductive means of achieving educational goals. Just the opposite was found to be true. As adults engaged in a learning activity in a playful environment, they discovered a supportive relationship between teacher and learner that generated adequate trust. Within this context these learners were able to risk and at times be seemingly silly. Without any coaching or encouragement, learners began to help each other to play and to learn. As each began to gain a sense of their own power, they became more confident and more productive.

When there are no stakes to be won, a noncompetitive atmosphere, and complete trust in an adult's ability, many creative learning stituations are self-generated. When adults see themselves as capable, they venture into unknown territory and continue to discover that they can do things on their own and accomplish a great deal with others.

When we asked adults to respond to the following ques-

tion, the results were overwhelming.

- Do you feel that knowing about, or working with, computers has in any way changed your child's attitude toward school?

On a rating scale of 1 to 5 ranging from not at all to very much, 98 percent indicated the attitute change was very much. This question was followed by another . . .

- How has it changed?

Again, on a scale of 1 to 5 going from very negative to very positive, 95 percent indicated very positive.

Although the parents were not asked that same question about their feelings, one has to speculate that computer literacy training had something to do with this positive response. Empowerment is the development of individual self-worth and self-confidence. This change then leads to a change in perception about institutions that define the adult's world.

While this project was limited to computer literacy, there are a hundred different learning acitivities that could be planned with and for adults to accomplish the same results. The computer happens to be a very convenient way to enchance this exciting, positive change.

REFERENCES

Freire, P. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. Seabury Press, 1973

Gavante, J. **Power and Powerlessness**. Urbana, Ill., University of Illinois Press 1980

Gould, Roger L. M.D. **Transformations, Growth and Change in Adult Life**. New York, Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1979

Vanderslice, Viricina J., "Empowerment: A Definition in Process," **Human Ecology Forum**, Volume 14, Number 1, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1984

Whitham, M. **Youth Empowerment: A Training Guide**. Boston: The National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1982